

Tennyson and *The Golden Treasury*

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WHEN F. T. PALGRAVE published *The Golden Treasury*, the most significant anthology of the nineteenth century, he had many reasons to dedicate it to Tennyson. Beyond mere admiration, his acknowledgement proclaimed the considerable aesthetic debt owed to the Poet Laureate. From the anthology's inception in 1860 to the final selection of poems published the following year, Tennyson had offered encouragement and poetic judgement. As Palgrave himself commented in 1861, referring to Tennyson's involvement with the selection, the entire book 'fairly represents his taste'.¹ More even than William Allingham's lyric anthology, *Nightingale Valley*, which Palgrave mischievously plundered, the selection became an initiation into verse for many future generations of poets. In the thirty-five years before Palgrave's death, over 140,000 copies of *The Golden Treasury* circulated through Victorian society; by the Second World War the number had reached more than half a million.² Rarely has one poet's aesthetic taste exercised such control over the formation of a literary canon. Even more unusual is for the hidden processes that shape these canons to be so well documented, and to record so meticulously the echoes of previous poets in another writer's ear. By capturing the stylistic connections between the poems he championed for inclusion

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and the verse forms of his own poetry, *The Golden Treasury* offers a rare glimpse into Tennyson's artistic development.

The anthology was devised while Palgrave was on holiday with Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelite Thomas Woolner, in Cornwall, in 1860. The intention was to create an anthology of 'the best songs and lyrical poems in the English language'.³ A *complete* record of the best of that genre was the aim – not merely a selection,⁴ as Palgrave was keen to express to the fledgling publishers, Macmillan and Co., whom the success of the *Treasury* would catapult to literary fame. Tennyson agreed to his involvement in the project, on one condition: that his own poetry not be included. And it was on this basis that Palgrave decided to omit the poetry of any living author, choosing as its final poet the former laureate, William Wordsworth, who had died exactly a decade before that summer. It was Palgrave who truly edited the project, consumed by a fervour that drove him through thousands of potential poems, and dozens of anthologies. It drove him, furthermore, to edit, polish – occasionally extract – these works until, in his mind, they shone as gems of lyric brilliance brighter even than their originals.⁵ The editorial flair or arrogance might seem admirable or astonishing. And it is true that many corruptions to already tainted texts were introduced via the *Treasury*, which furthered the need for *urtext* editions in the twentieth century, as the turn to original publications and manuscripts began to separate authorial fact from editorial fiction.

Tennyson, too, attempted to improve these poems;⁶ but there is no evidence that his changes survived, were serious, or were in any way dissimilar to his general habits of reading. His attempt, elsewhere, to 'improve' Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' has been described by Stephen Gill as 'one of the most audacious assaults ever by one great poet on another'.⁷ Yet Tennyson's annotations of his books confirm that this active process of reading and revision was a natural part of the way the poet scanned. One wonders whether Tennyson's acquaintances ever knew the light changes their poetry could undergo at his hands. For *The Golden Treasury*, Tennyson's substantial involvement lay in the task of selecting and approving the anthology's poems. Palgrave's draft preface to the first edition, never printed in his lifetime, explains how, 'In putting the book

together, all poems which appeared at all available or likely were gone through, after my selection, by George Miller and Thomas Woolner, sometimes alone, but perhaps oftener in courts of poetry held here & elsewhere'. Referring to this collaborative process of whittling down, he explains how 'the mass thus diminished, but retaining all that stood near admission, was gone through by Alfr. Tennyson during ten days at Xmas 60 [1860]'. Tennyson, he states, read 'almost everything twice over generally aloud', and 'his opinion was the final verdict'.⁸ It has been argued that Palgrave capitalised from exaggerating Tennyson's involvement, or that Tennyson's help was a capitulation in order to stop Palgrave's pestering.⁹ Yet the record of Tennyson's verdict on almost every shortlisted poem, even if reluctant, suggests otherwise. Palgrave's draft manuscript records the separate opinions of Woolner, Miller, and Tennyson in a code corresponding to a range of meanings from 'Omit' to 'Print decidedly'. These opinions have seldom been mentioned by critics, and their significance for Tennyson has never been fully analysed.¹⁰

The collection of poems reflects a sense that, for Victoria's laureate, the great ages of lyrical poetry were the Renaissance and the nineteenth century. The poems finally chosen for the *Treasury* tend to group around these two periods. The first, the Renaissance, is to be expected, but more extraordinary is the large selection of poems by the Romantics and their contemporaries, whose work, as has been observed, takes up nearly half the *Treasury* – more than 123 poems.¹¹ Francis Bacon, Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser, for example, received only one poem each. Thomas Wyatt in the end fared better, at two. And, as one might expect, Shakespeare outranked his contemporaries, with over thirty entries – including twenty from the sonnets alone. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by contrast, are ruthlessly relegated, for reasons mainly to do with blank and heroic verse. For the seventeenth century, as Megan Nelson notes, only fifty-five poems were included, and only forty-nine poems for the eighteenth century.¹² John Milton was treated with due respect, with *Lycidas*, of course, being championed by Tennyson. Yet the Metaphysical Poets lie somewhat beyond the pages of the anthology, with only three

of Andrew Marvell's poems, and Henry Vaughan receiving only one – the same number as Alexander Pope.¹³

Considered in this context, the volume of Romantic poetry is overwhelming. It highlights the potential of this anthology to shape literary canons around poets who, in the case of Wordsworth, had only been dead ten years by the anthology's publication. William Blake in a later edition, for instance: four poems; three more than Spenser.¹⁴ Robert Burns, Thomas Moore, Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell, and Byron amount to over forty poems. And the initial twenty-two poems of Shelley contributed a great deal to cementing the nineteenth century view of Shelley as the ineffectual angel, beating his luminous wings in the void (in Matthew Arnold's words).¹⁵ From the Pre-Raphaelites to Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost to Louis MacNeice, the anthology inspired generations of writers. The importance for Hardy is particularly well documented, after he was given a copy of the *Treasury* in 1862. Many of Hardy's quotations of Shelley, as Dennis Taylor notes, came from his own, heavily annotated copy of *The Golden Treasury*.¹⁶ When considering Swinburne's obsession with Shelley, and Thomas Hardy's relationship with the same, one begins to see how these early, pre-Leavis images of the poets were formed. The leading light of the *Treasury*, however, was Wordsworth, Tennyson's predecessor as Poet Laureate, who received more entries than Shakespeare. As Palgrave said to Wordsworth's brother, Christopher Wordsworth, 'That our selection from him was not twice as long as it is, was due partly . . . to Tennyson's own strong feeling that we shd. admit nothing which did not exhibit his honoured predecessor in his fullest strength & glory'.¹⁷ The fact that Tennyson continued to approve of the selection stands somewhat at odds with any simplistic narrative that he turned completely away from the Romantics in later life.

Far from his turning away, there are telling similarities between the verse forms of some of the poems Tennyson specifically championed for inclusion and Tennyson's own verse. The very first 'song' in the anthology, while certainly not Romantic, was chosen by Tennyson.¹⁸ Though simple, its many internal rhymes, ringing through into the word 'sing', say something of the qualities Tennyson himself enjoyed in song: 'Spring, the

sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king; / Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring, / Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing...'.¹⁹ Not English poetry's finest, but the poem speaks to Tennyson's fascination with whole chains of single rhymes, moving around that important verb, 'sing', that opens the collection. A rather more subtle chain of rhyme can be seen in Milton's *Lycidas*. The *Treasury*'s manuscript records that Tennyson wanted them to 'Print' this poem 'XXX' – which, in their code, means *three times* decidedly. As the manuscript duly documents, 'he wd not hear of the book unless it had this ... how often he has read it aloud to me, – & how admirably!'²⁰ The sounds of the poem are bound to some subtle artistry in the end rhyme, and it is easy to see how the self-consciously poetic subject matter might appeal to the poet:

Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.²¹

'Dear', 'peer', 'bier', 'tear', and just before this extract, 'sere'; 'due', 'knew'; the repetition of 'sing': those chains of muted rhymes control the eerie void in the conspicuously unrhymed 'parching wind', until the rhyme of that 'melodious tear' provides some final resonance.

The relationship of rhyme either to repetition or to resonance was one that remained central to Tennyson's style. The technique is particularly marked in his less serious poems, which we can hear through several of the anthology's entries. One such poem, by Walter Scott, is a particularly relevant instance, lines which Tennyson as a boy 'used to repeat', and as a man recited to Palgrave 'over & over again':²²

A weary lot is thine, fair maid,
A weary lot is thine!

To pull the thorn thy brow to braid,
 And press the rue for wine.
 A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
 A feather of the blue,
 A doublet of the Lincoln green –
 No more of me you knew
 My Love!
 No more of me you knew.²³

A murky depth pervades the verse form here: poised between the potential to be read in a bouncy, unserious manner, aided by those repetitions; and then something more serious and secret. 'A doublet of the Lincoln green – / No more of me you knew / My Love!' the speaker recounts, as the stanza fades out just as it hints at the beginnings of a more mysterious narrative. The effect is one that Tennyson, too, learnt in his more popular verse, fusing emotive and serious issues with accessible and lively rhythms. And it is these spirited rhythms that we can hear around the edges of Tennyson's comedic poem, 'The Doctor's Daughter': 'Sweet Kitty Sandilands, / The daughter of the doctor, / We drest her in the Proctor's bands, / And past her for the Proctor' (ll. 1-4).²⁴

Some of the best poems that Tennyson particularly desired for *The Golden Treasury* – and which he described as in some way musical – cut to the heart of the most musical effects in his own verse. Often, the effect is simply in the number of words and phrases that Tennyson came to use himself. The similarities are clearest in one poem by Thomas Moore, chosen by Tennyson, 'who much admired its longdrawn music':²⁵

Then I sing the wild song it once was rapture to hear
 When our voices, commingling, breathed like one on the ear;
 And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls,
 I think, O my Love! 'tis thy voice, from the Kingdom of Souls
 Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear.²⁶

Some sound rolling through the valley, twenty years before much of Tennyson's writing, might remind one of Tennyson's 'In the Valley of Caunteretz': 'All along the valley, where thy

waters flow, / I walk'd with one I loved two and thirty years ago' (ll. 3-4).²⁷ The passage shares much with Tennyson, through those words, 'song', 'hear', 'voices', 'breathed', 'ear', 'Echo', and the sense of sound that 'rolls', from 'far off', 'through the vale' of the poem from some other 'Kingdom of Souls'. These words run through Tennyson's verse like motifs. In 'The Lady of Shalott', for instance, we 'Hear a song that echoes cheerly' (l. 30); in 'The Palace of Art', the speaker's 'soul' yearns to 'hear her echo'd song' (l. 175). Tennyson's *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* sings of 'ever-echoing avenues of song' (l. 79), and *In Memoriam* finds 'A deeper voice across the storm', even while 'Thy voice is on the rolling air' (CXXVII, CXXX). Tennyson recalled how, as a child, he spread his arms and cried, 'I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind', and the 'words "far, far away"', he said, 'had always a strange charm for me'.²⁸ In 'The Ring', accordingly, a 'silent voice / Came on the wind', while 'Locksley Hall' – so reminiscent of Moore's poem – contains a 'song from out the distance in the ringing of thine ears', a phrase that resurfaces in 'Enoch Arden' (ll. 130-1, 84, 609). And that line of Thomas Moore's, 'as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison rolls', reminds of Tennyson's later description of the music of verse: 'It is a great roll of words, the music of words',²⁹ the comment itself rolling out its music.

In much of Tennyson's verse, 'thunder', too, rolls through the air like music, from some far-off place. At the age of 8, he made a line of poetry that he 'thought grander than Campbell, or Byron, or Scott. I rolled it out, it was this: "With slaughterous sons of thunder rolled the flood"'.³⁰ The motif would continue throughout his career, developing an increasing association with the music of verse. In his early poem, 'The Poet', 'words did gather thunder as they ran' (l. 49). In the 'Conclusion' to 'The May Queen', the 'trees began to whisper, and the wind began to roll', and 'music went that way my soul will have to go' (ll. 123, 138). In 'A Dream of Fair Women', the speaker stands 'Hearing the holy organ rolling waves / Of sound' (ll. 191-2), and *The Princess* tells of how the 'great organ almost burst his pipes', 'rolling thro' the court / A long melodious thunder' (ll. 450, 451-2). Laced through *The Golden*

Treasury are the Tennysonian effects that would merge in his works, speaking of music and sound so vividly that they would seem to resonate in the reader's ear. One poem by Wordsworth, for instance, speaks of 'A sound like thunder – everlastingly', while Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper* 'sings a melancholy strain; / O listen! for the vale profound / Is overflowing with the sound'. That overflowing sound comes again from a far-off land: 'Will no one tell me what she sings? / Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow / From old, unhappy, far-off things, / And battles long ago'.³¹ Wordsworth's 'England and Switzerland, 1802' (Palgrave's title) opens with 'Two Voices', the title of Tennyson's famous poem.³² And another work which Tennyson had doubly decided they should print ('divine', he commented)³³ was Wordsworth's 'The Reverie of Poor Susan', with its 'Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years: / Poor Susan has pass'd by the spot, and has heard / In the silence of morning the song of the bird'.³⁴ The song here becomes an event, an action of sound in the poem's story, like the many bird songs in Tennyson's narratives that foreground his sense of 'the music of words'.³⁵

The music of words was exactly what Tennyson heard in an exceptionally revealing poem by Byron.³⁶ In these highly saturated lines, the sonority of verse eventually breaks the bounds of its initially regular end rhyme:

There be none of Beauty's daughters
 With a magic like Thee;
 And like music on the waters
 Is thy sweet voice to me:
 When, as if its sound were causing
 The charmed ocean's pausing,
 The waves lie still and gleaming,
 And the lull'd winds seem dreaming:

And the midnight moon is weaving
 Her bright chain o'er the deep,
 Whose breast is gently heaving
 As an infant's asleep:
 So the spirit bows before thee

To listen and adore thee;
 With a full but soft emotion,
 Like the swell of Summer's ocean.³⁷

'There be none of Beauty's daughters / With a magic like Thee; / And like music on the waters / Is thy sweet voice to me': the traditional imagery here is kept in abeyance by the witching chant and the truncated rhythms of 'a magic like Thee'. As that 'sweet voice to me' risks slipping into cliché, the next lines complicate any such charge. This is an effect that cuts to the heart of Tennyson's style. Surely, it is not just that opening vowel music that Tennyson greatly admired. '[A]s if its sound were causing / The charmed ocean's pausing': that simile, 'as if', triggers a move deeper into the imagination, and with it the lines begin to shift in and out of odd and even numbers of 'weaving' syllables. In this poem, as in much of Tennyson's verse, it is that very entry into the imagination that causes or licenses the lengthening yet pausing calm of the lines. It also seems to license those present participles – the '*causing*' and '*pausing*', '*gleaming*' and '*dreaming*', which cling together in pairs even as their shared end-*ings* bind together.

The present participles only cease, in fact, with those lines, 'the deep, / Whose breast is gently heaving / As an infant's asleep'. The entire waters of the slowing ocean depths become transformed into some breathing infant, as the present participles are gently closed by the warmth of 'deep' and 'asleep' that weigh down and punctuate the firmness of 'weaving' and 'heaving', with which they nearly rhyme. Variations of this effect happen again and again in Tennyson, where the rhymes take over from conversation, apostrophe, or monologue. With that feminine ending of 'emotion' and 'ocean', this is clearly a Byronic, not a Tennysonian voice. Yet Tennyson's verse forms employ the same artistic techniques, which have now come to be associated with a Tennysonian style. Tennyson, for example, also achieves these floods of sound, so that the matching of the line to rhyme gives the sense of sound flowing through from that other imaginative world. A similar technique, in a different voice, delivers the music in this example from Tennyson's poem 'The Poet's Mind': 'In the middle leaps a fountain / Like sheet

lightning, / Ever brightening / With a low melodious thunder' (ll. 24-7). Or in Tennyson's 'The Grasshopper': 'What hast thou to do with evil, / Shooting, singing, ever springing / In and out the emerald glooms, / Ever leaping, ever singing, / Lighting on the golden blooms?' (ll. 40-4).³⁸ There are many other parallels between *The Golden Treasury* and Tennyson's own poems; but most important for Tennyson's stylistic development is how, repeatedly in his work, and in many of the poems in the *Treasury*, the resonance of rhyme becomes the main event of a poem, taking over from its narrative.

The Golden Treasury is a unique artefact of artistry and artistic cooperation, demonstrating immense shifts in the landscape of English verse that in Tennyson's life would continue at the minutest level of composition and revision. That Tennyson not only approved of the poems, but helped with the selection, allowed the anthology to be created – not necessarily in his image – but certainly in harmony with his poetic style. Its attention to the Renaissance and the Romantics has great importance for literary history; it amounted to an attempt to recodify the lyrical canon. And its significance is equally widespread for literary forms, revealing the ways that Tennyson learnt from the techniques of previous poets. Chief among them is that Tennysonian effect of highly saturated rhymes suddenly overflowing their form, as the sonority of verse breaks the bounds of end rhyme. In highlighting the affinities between Tennyson and his predecessors, the *Treasury* remains an important object of enquiry for studies of a writer we have come to see as the archetypal Victorian poet.

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NOTES

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¹ London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 2^r. See Christopher Ricks, 'The Making of *The Golden Treasury*', in

The Golden Treasury: of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language, ed. Christopher Ricks (1991), p. 441.

² London, British Library, Macmillan One-Volume Editions Book, uncatalogued, pp. 218, 923. The printing figures for *The Golden Treasury*'s 'first' and 'second' editions until Palgrave's death amount to 140,775 copies. This figure does not take account of the New York imprints, or other special printings of the anthology's individual sections, which furthered its international success. See also the Macmillan Edition Books from 1892 onwards, British Library, Add. MS 55909-55930.

³ See the anthology's subtitle: *The Golden Treasury: of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (Cambridge, 1861).

⁴ See two letters to Macmillan, most likely dated 16 February 1861 and April–June 1861, in four folders of autograph letters from Palgrave to Macmillan at the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. See also Megan Jane Nelson, 'Francis Turner Palgrave and *The Golden Treasury*', Ph.D. thesis (University of British Columbia, 1985), p. 121.

⁵ Nelson, 'Francis Turner Palgrave', p. 140. See also Palgrave's title, 'The Daffodils', for Wordsworth's '[I wandered lonely as a cloud]'. The title perpetuated for years an emphasis on the flowers rather than the lonely wandering and imagination of the speaker: London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 384^r.

⁶ B. Ifor Evans, 'Tennyson and the Origins of *The Golden Treasury*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 Dec. 1932, p. 941.

⁷ Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford, 1998), p. 194.

⁸ 'Some few poems were added after Tennyson's recension: but about most I knew that he w^d have approved.' London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 2^r.

⁹ David E. Latané, Jr., 'Treasure Sub Rosa: An Introduction', *Victorian Poetry*, 37 (1999), 135-44: 139-40.

¹⁰ Christopher Ricks has documented the opinions recorded in Palgrave's manuscript, which are reproduced in the notes to his edition of *The Golden Treasury*. Ricks also lists the poems that were added to or dropped from Palgrave's subsequent editions.

¹¹ Nelson, 'Francis Turner Palgrave', p. 135. In the first edition, Book IV contained 123 poems and Book III contained eleven poems by Robert Burns.

¹² Nelson, 'Francis Turner Palgrave', pp. 133, 135. Book II covers the period 1616-1700, while Book III covers 1700-1800. Throughout the *Treasury*, poems were moved out of chronological order, according to their character, and whether the authors were anonymous.

¹³ Andrew Marvell would eventually receive five poems.

¹⁴ In the 1861 edition there were no entries for Blake. See Ricks, 'The Making of *The Golden Treasury*', p. 447.

¹⁵ *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. W. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor, 1960), i. 237.

¹⁶ Dennis Taylor, 'Hardy's Copy of *The Golden Treasury*', *Victorian Poetry*, 37 (1999), 165-91; Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford, 1938), p. 41. For an account of Tennyson's encounters with the Pre-Raphaelite circle in the summer of 1860, as well as of Palgrave's and Tennyson's bickering, see William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 2 vols. (1905), ii. 205-15.

¹⁷ Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, pp. 103-4; Robert Woof, *Tennyson 1809-1892: A Centenary Celebration* (Grasmere, 1992), p. 44.

¹⁸ 'Chosen by A.T.': London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 8^r. For annotations in one of Palgrave's copy texts, see Palgrave's copy of Robert Bell's *Songs from the Dramatists*, described by Kathleen Tillotson in 'Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* and Tennyson: Another Source', *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, 5 (1988), 49-54. The copy was in Tillotson's possession.

¹⁹ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 1.

²⁰ London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 98^r.

²¹ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 54.

²² London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 294^r.

²³ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 191.

²⁴ Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 2 vols. (1897), i. 248.

²⁵ London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 303^r.

²⁶ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 196. See also the fifth number in Thomas Moore and John Stevenson's *A Selection of Irish Melodies* (1813).

²⁷ Except where cited otherwise, references to Tennyson's poetry are taken from the Eversley edition.

²⁸ *Memoir*, i. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ii. 386.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, ii. 93.

³¹ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), pp. 267, 250-1.

³² The poem was chosen by Tennyson: London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 318^v.

³³ London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 381^r.

³⁴ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 251.

³⁵ *Memoir*, ii. 386.

³⁶ As Palgrave records, Tennyson 'greatly admires its music': London, British Library, Add. MS 42126, fo. 265^r.

³⁷ *The Golden Treasury* (1861), p. 173.

³⁸ Alfred Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), p. 110.